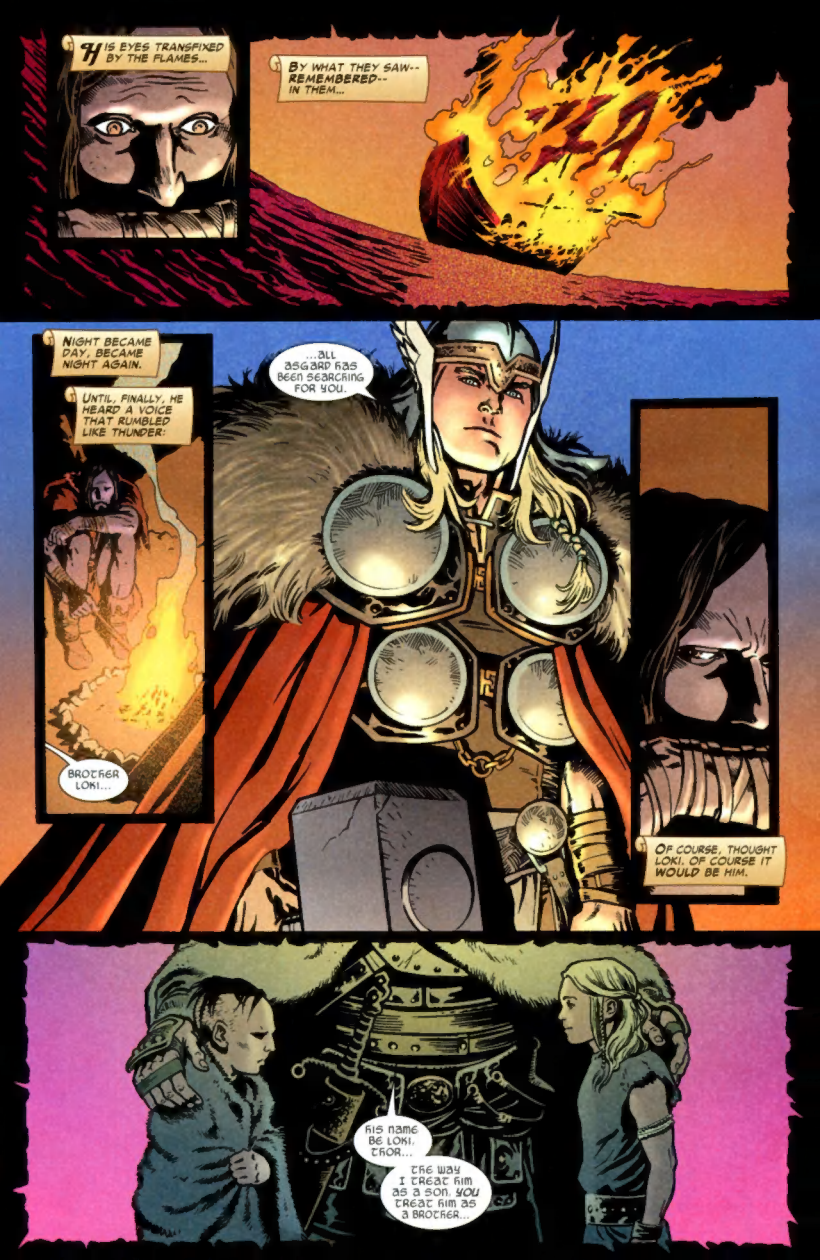
To this place, he has come.
Loki, the trickster.
Loki, the shape-shifter.
Loki, the cursed.
The first thing he did was build a house with four walls and four windows, so no one could surprise him, whichever way they might approach.
(Yet still...he felt fear.)
Using thread from his clothes, he wove a net to catch fish in the churning pool at the base of the falls.
The thread reminded him of...
But no, that humiliation was over.
He was done with that now: he would never be bound like that again...


His eyes transfixed by the flames...
By what they saw-- remembered-- in them...
Night became day, became night again.
Until, finally, he heard a voice that rumbled like thunder:
Brother Loki...
...all Asgard has been searching for you.
Of course, thought Loki. Of course it would be him.
his name be Loki, Thor...
the way I treat him as a son. you treat him as a brother...

"...it was meant to have been mine."
Asgard,
Today And Forever Ago.
This is one of the old tales of the sly one, Loki, when he was just a boy, practicing his riding with Balder, the most adored of the gods.
She's beautiful, Loki. Isn't she?
Yes, Balder...
...Sif is.
Balder laughed.
Look elsewhere, Loki. There are many beautiful women in Asgard, and Sif's heart is bound to Thor's.
Of course, thought the trickster. Of course she would be his.
Sif with her beautiful golden hair...

THOR--
WAIT--
PLEASE--
NONE OF YOUR LIES, LOKI! FIX WHAT YOU DID OR I WILL CRUSH EVERY WRETCHED BONE IN YOUR BODY!
ODIN SIGHED. IT WEARIED HIM WHENEVER THOR BULLIED HIS YOUNGER, SMALLER BROTHER.
THOR? FIX WHAT?
HERE, ALL-FATHER...
M-MY HAIR...
IT WAS A J-JOKE, A-A P-PRANK--
AND I WILL MAKE IT RIGHT, I SWEAR--
WITHIN THE HOUR, LOKI HAD SET OFF FOR SVARTALFHEIM, THE LAND OF THE DARK ELVES...

IN THE END, THE SONS OF IVALDI PRESENTED LOKI WITH:
THE WAVE OF GOLDEN STRANDS FOR SIF; A MAGIC SPEAR THEY CALLED GUNGNIR; AND AN ENCHANTED, COLLAPSIBLE SHIP THEY CALLED SKIDBLADNIR.
OUR FIRES WERE STILL BLAZING WHEN WE FINISHED THE HAIR...
IT COST US LITTLE TO MAKE THESE OTHER GIFTS FOR THE GODS OF ASGARD...
A PLAN BLOOMED IN LOKI'S MIND LIKE A DARK FLOWER...
WELL DONE, SONS OF IVALDI...
ALL OF ASGARD SHALL HEAR OF YOUR PROWESS...
BUT THE TRICKSTER DID NOT GO BACK TO ASGARD. (AT LEAST, NOT YET.)
HE WENT, INSTEAD, TO THE HALL OF BROKK AND EITRI, TWO OTHER DWARVES RENOWNED FOR THEIR SMITHERY.
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN SUCH CRAFTSMANSHIP? SUCH HANDIWORK?
DO YOU, EITRI, THINK YOU COULD MAKE TREASURES AS FINE AS THESE?
NO QUESTION. THESE THINGS AREN'T SO SPECIAL.
HMM. I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT...IN FACT, I'LL STAKE MY HEAD ON IT...
IF YOU CAN CRAFT TREASURES MORE SPLENDID THAN THE ONES THE SONS OF IVALDI MADE, I'LL FORFEIT MY HEAD TO YOU. HAPPILY.

The dwarves, eager to separate Loki's head from his body (and to take the hair, spear and ship for themselves) accepted the bet and set to work...
...while outside their hall, Loki mused:
The gods would love him for these gifts...
They would look at him and think: "It doesn't matter that he isn't as strong as Thor, as beautiful as Balder...look at how Loki honors us with treasures..."
Unless, of course... he lost the bet with Eitri.
Curiously, as Eitri and Brokk started work on their third treasure, a wasp entered their chamber, buzzing about Eitri's ears...
ZZZZZZZZ
...stinging him on his eyelids at a particularly delicate moment--
aaaarrggh--
cursed wasp--!

When Eitri and Brokk emerged from their hall, they had no idea what Loki, the shape-shifter, had done...
They presented their treasures: a golden arm-ring, a golden boar, and--
This hammer is Mjolnir...
A wasp bit my left eyelid. The blood from the sting blinded me for a moment, and half its handle broke off...
Mjolnir...
It was, Loki thought, as though the hammer were made for him. A runt, like him. Flawed, like him. Misunderstood...
...like him.
But magnificent, no question.
Go with Loki. Hear Odin's judgment and claim the trickster's head.

On their way back to Asgard, Loki carried the massive hammer close to his body, the way a mother would a child...
In Gladsheim, before the assembled gods, Loki presented his gifts, asking Odin to judge which one was worthiest.
He used his magicks to restore Sif's golden hair...
He gave Odin the spear Gungnir, (thinking the gesture would ensure that all-Father decree it the greatest treasure, allowing Loki to keep his head...)
It never misses its mark nor fails to kill...
The arm-ring he gave to Freyja; Heimdall the boar; and Skidbladnir, the magic ship...to Balder.
It is, perhaps, not as beautiful as you, Balder, but blow on its sails and it swells large enough to carry all the gods of Asgard...
It seemed, then, that all the gift-giving was done. But Brokk raised a hand:
There is one other treasure my brother Eitri forged in his fires!

SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY, THE SLY ONE PRESENTED THE MIGHTY HAMMER MJOLNIR...
THAT ONE--
BEAUTIFUL AS MY SPEAR IS--
AND THOUGH ITS HANDLE IS SHORTER THAN ONE MIGHT EXPECT--
THAT HAMMER TRUMPS EVERYTHING ELSE WE HAVE SEEN TODAY.
WAIT--
ALL-FATHER--
THAT MEANS--
LOKI'S HEAD IS FORFEIT! LOKI'S HEAD IS BROKK'S!
THE GODS LAUGHED, THEN. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT? HOW WOULD THE TRICKSTER ESCAPE HIS FATE?
(THEY KNEW THAT IF LOKI WAS ANYTHING, HE WAS CLEVER...)
MY... MY...

...my head may be forfeit, but my neck is not.
If you can take my head without compromising my neck, it is yours...
If not, then Loki's head stays with Loki!
The gods murmured and nodded to each other. Loki made a fine point...
...but Brokk was not yet done.
And appealed to the one god who might hear him.
Thor. You have honor. You know Loki's tricks. Help me...
You will not make a mockery of everything, Loki.

THOR AND BROKK FELL ON LOKI.
THOR HELD THE SQUIRMING TRICKSTER DOWN WHILE BROKK USED AN AWL AND LEATHER TWINE TO...
I MAY NOT HAVE GOTTEN MY PRIZE, YOUR HEAD. BUT THAT, AT LEAST, WILL KEEP YOUR LIPS FROM TELLING ANY MORE LIES FOR A WHILE!
THE GODS CHUCKLED. IT HAD BEEN WELL PLAYED ON ALL SIDES...

"I heard the laughter as I pulled the thread from my mouth and thought:
"I do not belong...
"I am alone..."
What I remember, clearly, from that time before time...
...is that AFTER you returned with your treasures for the gods, and wove the golden locks back onto Sif's head, Asgard went to sleep, and the next morning, we awoke...
"...and my beautiful Sif, with her BEAUTIFUL golden hair--"
Be not this, Thor. LOKI, out of spite.
I never--
That's a lie--
I RESTORED that harlot's hair--
...
These... STORIES are irrelevant.

NEXT

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